UNDERSTANDING THE CRAFT AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC REATIONS

By

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PROLOGUE

The invitation extended to me by Chief Superintendent of Customs (CSC) Abdullahi Aliyu Maiwada, Mnipr, National Public Relations Officer of the Nigeria Customs Service is a rare privilege and I am very grateful. Thank you my dear Professional College for the opportunity to speak at this conference and also to moderate the different sessions.

INTRODUCTION

This paper highlights the need to understand the craft and practice of Public Relations and the presentation is divided into eight parts:

-Prologue

- Introduction

-Purpose of Presentation

-Definitions

-Practice of Public Relations

-Desirable skills in Public Relations

-Conclusion

-Future of Public Relations practice

PURPOSE OF PRESENTATION

The need to understand Public Relations skills are enormous and goes beyond the expectations of outcomes to setting of standards.

1. Public Relations Practice is a trade or an occupation that requires management techniques and these techniques or tools are acquired through consistent learning.

And so, the Nigerian Institute of Public Relations as a body established by Law (CAP N114. Laws of the Federation 2004) determine what standards of knowledge and skills are to be attained by Public Relations practitioners. As part of its condition, the institute makes it compulsory for members to attend at least three Mandatory Continuing Professional Development (MCPD), before an upgrade of membership can be effected.

2. Many forms of misunderstanding sprung from lack of communication and one of the major purpose of Public Relations is to improve upon the communication processes of an organization

and its publics, establish new ways of setting up a two-way communication flow of information and understanding.

3. It is pertinent to note that understanding the craft in modern Public Relations practice requires a focus on the 3Es of Public Relations. These are;

   Excellence
   Efficiency
   Effectiveness

Therefore, you need to train to listen, build capacity regularly, understudy industry experts to gain relevance and prominence in order to avoid mistakes by seeking for inputs and study social trends.

It has also been widely recognized and appreciated that Public Relations is an essential tool in the creation of goodwill and understanding of relationship among stakeholders and its publics.

DEFINITIONS;

There are several definitions of Public Relations, one of which is the British Institute of Public Relations (BIPR) which defined Public Relations as the ''planned and sustained efforts to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between organization and its publics''. This definition which was amended in 1987 according to Black (1990), throw up key words. Firstly, 'Planned' which implies that Public Relations as earlier established is not an impromptu profession but an activity that requires caution and careful efforts to attain.

Secondly, the BIPR definition draws attention to every Public Relations campaign which must have as its goal, establishing and maintaining of mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. To understand the craft of Public Relations is to cultivate a deliberate planned action that tilts towards relationship building.

Another interesting definition of Public Relations among the 472 different definitions studied by Dr. Rex Harlow, a veteran Public Relations practitioner from San Francisco is that of Cutlip and Broom (2000), which defined Public Relations as a 'Management function that identifies, establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends'.

This is perhaps the most suitable definition in that it places the success and failure of the organization upon the shoulders of those who are responsible for the administration of the organization. As a management function, Public Relations occupies strategic role in ensuring effective communication among stakeholder groups.

According to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in a statement issued on the 6th November 1982, (Black 1990), stated that Public Relations helps our complex, pluralistic society to reach decisions and function more effectively by contributing to mutual understanding among groups and institutions. It serves a wide range variety of institution in society such as businesses, trade unions, government agencies, foundations, and non-government organizations. It serves to bring private and public policies into harmony.

Black (1976) sums up the purpose of Public Relations practice as establishing a two-way communication to resolve conflicts of interest by seeking common grounds to establish understanding based on truth,

knowledge and full information. Therefore, the practice of Public Relations center around strengthening mutual understanding between the organization and anyone who deals with it both within and without. Derivable from the definitions is the fact that Public Relations aims at achieving friendship, understanding goodwill, good image, loyalty and commitment.

Therefore, Public Relations is managing of perception as the voice of the organization. It should be more proactive than being reactive, deliver credibility by giving value and getting value in return.

A meeting of more than thirty national and regional Public Relations associations Mexico City in 1978, as cited in Ajala(1993) adopted one of the very popular definitions otherwise known as ''The Mexican Statement,'' which defined Public Relations as " the art and science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counseling organization's leaderships and implementing planned programmes of action, which will serve both the organization's and the public interest.

PRACTICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

In analyzing the planned programmes of action of Public Relations practice is to know that it is used in everyday lifestyle;

1. As a daily activity that is carried on daily in relationships with individuals and friends.
2. That it exists among family members and friends.
3. In corporate organization as a management function.

Public Relations is not an accidental profession and therefore the need for proper preparation and continuous development as a professionalized activity carefully guided by ethics and code of conduct not of impulse. The implication is that organizations with good usage of Public Relations generate higher income than organizations that do not.

DESIRABLE SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Understanding the craft and practice of Public Relations require development of the right skills, some of which include;

- Public Relations Writing
- Research and Evaluation of Trends
- Interpersonal communication
- Media analysis and cultural literacy
- Critical thinking and observations
- Business Knowledge

CONCLUSION

This conference is a way of up-scaling of human capital development and a mark of analyzing modern trends in Public Relations and investment in the future for the expected mileage in the various reforms being carried out by the Controller General of Customs, Bashir Adewale Adeniyi led leadership in Nigeria.

It is also a medium of expanding the horizons and interdisciplinary convergence and preplanning for expertise of Public Relations practice.

FUTURE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

Today is the foundation laying ceremony of what the future of Public Relations practice would look like in Artificial Intelligence or the New Media in the Nigeria Customs Service.

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